



H.Res. 240 - Urging all member countries of the International Commission of the International Tracing Service (ITS) who have yet to ratify the May 2006 Amendments to the 1955 Bonn Accords Treaty, to expedite the ratification process to allow for open access to the Holocaust archives located at Bad Arolsen, Germany

Floor Situation

H.Res. 240 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Alcee Hastings (D-FL) on March 13, 2007. The House Foreign Affairs Committee agreed to seek consideration under suspension of the rules, by voice vote, on March 27, 2007.

H.Res. 240 is expected to be considered on the floor on April 25, 2007.

Summary

H.Res. 240 resolves that the House of Representatives:

- commends in the strongest terms all countries that have to date ratified the amendments to the Bonn Accords to allow for open access to the Holocaust archives of the International Tracing Service (ITS) located at Bad Arolsen, Germany;
- commends those countries that have committed to expedite the process of releasing the archives and expects those countries to abide by their commitments;
- strongly urges all countries that have yet to ratify the amendments to abide by their treaty obligations made in May 2006 and to expedite the ratification of these amendments;
- strongly urges all Commission members to consider the short time left to Holocaust survivors and unanimously consent to open the ITS archives should all countries not ratify the amendments by May 2007;
- expresses the hope that bureaucratic and diplomatic processes will not further delay this process; and,
- refuses to forget the murder of 6,000,000 Jews and more than 5,000,000 other victims during the Holocaust by Nazi perpetrators and their collaborators.

Background

The largest closed Holocaust-era archives in the world, the International Tracing Service (ITS) archives located in Bad Arolsen, Germany, are administered by the International

Committee of the Red Cross, and contain an estimated 50,000,000 records on the fates of some 17,500,000 individual victims of Nazi war crimes. Access to individual records can be requested by Holocaust survivors and their descendants, yet many who have requested information in the past have reported facing significant delays and even unresponsiveness; and, the records remain inaccessible to researchers and research institutions.

The 1955 Bonn Accords, the treaty governing the administration of the ITS, established an International Commission of 11 member countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States) charged with overseeing the administration of the ITS Holocaust archives. Following years of delay, the Commission met in May 2006 in Luxembourg, and the International Commission of the ITS agreed on amendments to the Bonn Accords which would allow researchers to use the archives and would allow each Commission member country to receive digitized copies of archive materials and make the records available to researchers under the respective national laws relating to archives and privacy.

The May 2006 Amendments to the Bonn Accords require each of the 11 members of the Commission to ratify the amendments before open access to the Holocaust archives is permitted. Only 4 out of the 11 Commission member countries (the United States, Israel, Poland, and the Netherlands) have ratified the amendments to date. On March 8, 2007, representatives from the 11 member countries of the International Commission of the ITS met in the Netherlands and reviewed the current ratification status of each country and the ratification process in its entirety.

Cost

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has not scored this legislation.

Staff Contact

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